

A WITNESS AND A PARTAKER NO. 2610

A SERMON
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*“The elders which are among you I exhort,
who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,
and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.”
1 Peter 5:1*

KINDLY notice, dear friends, the apostle's great gentleness. Peter was not always thus gentle, but the Spirit of God had rested upon him and now he writes with much tenderness. He does not say, “As an apostle, I command,” but “As an elder, I exhort.” It is always well to combine the *suaviter in modo* with the *fortiter in re*, that is, suavity in our method blended with strength in the thing itself.

There are some who are very blustering in their style of speech and there are others who, if they do not bluster, yet in the smallest matter always put forth their greatest force or what they think to be so. They command and rebuke with all authority—yet here is Peter, who certainly was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, and he speaks, not by way of command, but addressing the elders, he tenderly exhorts them.

Oh, that we may always manifest such a meek and gentle spirit—not drive men, but draw them to Christ—not terrify and threaten, but entice and woo to the Savior those to whom we are speaking or writing!

Next, notice Peter's humility. “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder.” He was an elder, most truly, as are all those who, in word and doctrine, feed the flock of God and who, at Christ's command, take the oversight of the souls of men. But Peter was much more than an elder, he was an apostle.

There were but few apostles and those who were called to that high dignity were greatly favored—yet Peter does not mention his higher office, but with true humility, he puts himself on a level with his brethren. “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder.” My brother, if God has given to you extraordinary talent, do not exalt yourself on that account. If others willingly follow your leadership and you have the privilege of rendering to the Lord greater service than they can give, what have you that you have not received?

And should not the chief among the saints be the servant of all? Is not he really the highest in Christ's esteem who is willing to be accounted the lowest? Therefore, let no man exalt himself or think highly of himself, for this he ought not to do. We admire in Peter—the once headstrong, impetuous Peter—the gentleness blended with humility which leads him to say, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder.”

At the same time, let us especially note the wisdom of Peter, for it would have been an unwise thing for him to speak to the elders as an apostle, for they might have replied to him, “You do not know the worry and toil and trouble of our service. You labor in a higher sphere. You, sitting on the apostolic benches, are far above us. We, poor plain elders, cannot hope to attain to such eminence as yours.”

“No, my brethren,” says Peter, “I am one of you, for I also am an elder, and as a brother speaks to brethren, so do I exhort you. Knowing all your travail of heart and all your hard service in the cause of the Master, I, sympathizing with you, and altogether one with you, speak from my heart to your heart.

Exhorting you, the elders, I who am also an elder say to you, Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away."

It will always be our wisdom, dear friends, to put ourselves as much as we can into the position of those whom we address. It is a pity for anyone ever to seem to preach down to people—it is always better to be as nearly as possible on the same level as they are. Paul knew this and therefore he became "all things to all men."

To the Jew, he was a Jew. Among Gentiles, he was a Gentile, for it so happened that he belonged to both classes. He was one with all men—barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free. If he had to argue with the learned upon Mars' Hill, he could be a match for them. If he had to speak with the rough and illiterate, he eschewed all beauty of language and talked to them in the plainest style.

And you and I, if we want to win men to Christ, must act after the same wise fashion. Dear Sunday school teachers, would you be the means of blessing to the children under your charge? Then, be yourselves children. Keep a child's heart throbbing beneath a manly breast. If you are a mother, go to the girls in your class as though you were still a girl yourself, and you shall soon find the key of their heart, and enter into the innermost chambers of their spirit.

A true man welcomes a fellow man. He sees that he is a member of the great family of mankind and he says to him, "Come in." But if you, in your majestic greatness, speak to me like Jupiter thundering from a cloud, I shall not be likely to regard you. Or if I do regard *you*, your message will be forgotten in the grandeur and glory of yourself.

This is what never ought to happen, my brethren—that people should think of us and forget our message. Let us belittle ourselves that we may magnify our God. Let the truth be borne before us like a shield. And though we are the Lord's armor bearers, let us hide behind the great shield which we lift up before the eyes of men. "'The elders which are among you I exhort'—not as Peter, the head of the College of Apostles—but as one who is a fellow-elder with you." Therein, we see Peter's gentleness, humility, and wisdom combined, and we shall be wise if we imitate him in all those respects.

With this introduction, I now come to speak of the two great offices which Peter said that he filled. I cannot help calling them great, yet they are open to you and to me—and I hope that, by God's grace, we also have in our measure been what Peter said that he was—"A witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed."

I. First, then, let us think of Peter as "A WITNESS OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST."

And as far as possible, let us be witnesses with him. Peter was, what we have not been, *an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ*. He actually and in very deed saw our divine Master in His terrible griefs. Peter could never forget that he saw the Lord Jesus in His agony in the garden. He was one of the three disciples who failed to watch with their Lord even for one hour, and who, for very sorrow, fell asleep within a stone's cast of the place where Christ was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

Peter remembered how, when the Master rose from prayer, and said, "He is at hand that does betray me," he was there and saw the traitor imprint that cruel kiss upon the cheek of Him who still called him friend. Peter was, about that time, drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of Malchus, and he could not fail to remember the look upon his Master's face when he who had eaten bread with Him did lift up his heel against Him, and the Son of Man was betrayed with a kiss from the apostate apostle.

Peter was also an eyewitness of our Lord's being hurried away to the bar of Annas, where He underwent His preliminary examination. He remembered seeing one smite Him on the mouth. He could recall how they charged Him with blasphemy. He could recollect how, after the first examination was over, Annas sent Him, bound, unto Caiaphas.

Peter was in the palace of Annas, warming himself by the fire, so he was an eyewitness of all that transpired. I do not quite know how far that eye-witnessing went, for the time came when he denied his Master, but he could never forget that gaze of concentrated agony and pity when Jesus looked at him—

not so much reproachfully, perhaps, as mournfully—feeling in His own soul that sorrow which He knew that Peter must ere long feel. A spark from the torch of the Savior’s anguish set the heart of Peter on a blaze, and he went out and wept bitterly.

I believe—I cannot help believing—that Peter rallied, by and by, from his fit of cowardice and that he came to the front again, and saw the Master in Pilate’s judgment hall. You know the story of our Savior’s griefs and woes, and I think that Peter and others of the apostles were eyewitnesses of His sufferings.

They saw Him after He had been scourged. They marked Him after He had been despised, and flouted, and mocked. They saw Him as the cross-bearer and heard Him say, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.” They watched Him as He went in awful anguish along the *Via Dolorosa* to the mount of crucifixion, and they stood and saw Him nailed to the tree, to die there, like a felon, with no relief or succor, for God Himself forsook Him. And the bitterest pain of all was that He had to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Possibly, Peter saw it all. Certainly he was an eyewitness of Christ’s sufferings, and I think, when he was writing to these elders, he seemed to say to them, “Feed the flock of God, for I saw the great Shepherd when He bought that flock. I was there when He purchased the sheep with His own blood. Then, after He had risen from the dead, three times He said to me, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?’ And when I answered, ‘Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee,’ He said to me, ‘Feed My lambs. Shepherdize My sheep. Feed My sheep.’ Therefore, O my brethren, by His agony and bloody sweat, by His cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, by His glorious resurrection and ascension, I beseech you, ‘Feed the flock of God which He has purchased with Jesus’ own blood.’” I see great force in this exhortation by the eyewitness who is writing to his fellow elders.

But dear brethren, you and I, never having seen Christ in His sufferings, might never have had a participation in this part of our text if there had not been another kind of witnessing, namely, *the faith-witness*. I do not place this second in importance, though I put it second in order, for, indeed, it is of the very first importance.

There were thousands who were eyewitnesses of our Lord’s sufferings who, nevertheless, saw not the true meaning of them. They saw the dear Sufferer besmeared with His own blood, but into His wounds they never looked by faith. Thousands saw the Savior die, but they simply went their way back to Jerusalem, some of them beating on their breasts, but none of them believing in Him or really knowing the secret of that wondrous death.

I trust that I am addressing many who could be grouped together as faith-witnesses of the sufferings of Christ. Speaking for myself, I do remember well when my sins, like an intolerable burden, crushed me down. I dared not look up and I never should have been able to look up, or to speak to anyone of the joy which is now within my bosom, if I had not, by faith, seen—

*“One hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood,
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.*

*“Sure never till my latest breath
Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.*

*A second look He gave, which said,
‘I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I die, that thou may’st live.’”*

Then I saw not only that Christ Jesus died upon the cross, but I also perceived who He was, and why He died, and what He accomplished by that death. I was helped to learn that He “loved me and gave himself for me.” I understood that He took my place that I might take His place—that He took my sin that I might take His righteousness—that He bore my woe that I might share His joy.

And when I saw that—I do not mean when I heard about it—I do not mean when I read of it—but when I saw it with my soul’s inner eye, and not only understood it, but perceived my share in my Savior’s sacrifice, and believed in Him to the saving of my soul, oh, it was a blessed day for me! Many of you, dear friends, know well what I mean, for you also had just such a sight as I have described, you were faith-witnesses of Christ’s sufferings.

With some of us, many days have passed since we had that first sight of our suffering Lord, yet that sight has been often renewed to us. Sitting at the communion table, I have seen it most clearly—the bread and the wine have set forth Christ’s broken body and poured-out blood, and my soul has realized within herself His Godhead and His manhood, His perfection and His grief, His sinlessness and yet His sin-bearing, His suretyship and the way He smarted for it. And it has been a great joy to see it, and to be able to sing,—

*“He bore on the tree the sentence for me,
And now both the Surety and sinner are free”—*

for Jesus redeemed us completely and effectually when He died upon the cross. Many of you, beloved, have been in like manner, faith-witnesses of Christ’s sufferings.

There are some who depreciate this faith-witness, but sirs, it is faith that saves. You may be an eyewitness and yet perish as Judas did. You may be an eyewitness and yet be lost as Pilate was. You may be an eyewitness and still hate Christ as Caiaphas did. But if you become a faith-witness, then shall you be included among those of whom it is written, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” Such a faith-view begets repentance, and hope, and love, and brings salvation to every soul that has it.

Peter, then, was an eyewitness, but better still, he was a faith-witness. And this being the case, he went on to be a *testifying witness*. If a man sees anything happen, he is a witness of it, but he is more manifestly a witness when he comes and says that he saw it—when he appears in court and bears a public testimony concerning it.

I judge that the principal business of any minister of Christ, or of any elder of the church of Christ, is to bear testimony to the sufferings of Christ. If the atoning sufferings of Christ are left out of a ministry, that ministry is worthless. “The blood is the life thereof,” is as true about sermons as it is about animals and sacrifices.

A bloodless Gospel, a Gospel without the atonement, is a Gospel of devils, and not the Gospel of God. Many are laboring hard, till their oars bend, to get away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ—I mean hundreds of so-called ministers of Christ—but in proportion as they forsake the Gospel, they cease to be what they pretend to be.

They are not the ministers of God or of His Christ. They are not ambassadors telling of reconciliation to men, if in their teaching the sufferings of Christ are beclouded, and their cause, and motive, and object are obscured. It is the glory of some of us that whatever else we bear witness to, we certainly are witnesses of the sufferings of Christ.

We declare to men that there is no hope for them but in Christ who died. We testify to them that we have ourselves exercised faith in His death and have thereby received eternal life. We tell them that we know that what we say is true—we are as sure of it as was that disciple who, when he saw the blood and water flowing from Christ’s side, bore witness to it, and added, “He knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.”

These things are not like dreams to us, they are part of our very being. We have believed in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, our troubled conscience has therein found peace, our soul has been filled with all the fullness of God, and therefore we are and must be witnesses to the sufferings of the crucified Son of God, to the reality of the atonement that He made on the cross, and to the effect of that atonement upon the heart and conscience of all those who receive it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is not only the minister's work, but it is your work, too. We are all to be constantly bearing our witness to Christ and saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." You know what the people said of John the Baptist when he was dead—it is a kind of epitaph which any one of us might be glad to have put on our tombstone—"John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true."

He had no great talents, he was not noted for His eloquence, he was not a man of commanding presence, he had no recondite knowledge, he had no profound logical power, but all that he said concerning Christ was true. I would like to have John the Baptist's epitaph as my own and I would be glad for you to have it, too. And that in life and death, we might be known as true witnesses to the sufferings of Christ, the power of which we have felt in our own souls.

There is one other view of this witness-bearing, and that is, that Peter was, to a very large extent, a *partaking witness* in the sufferings of Christ. He does not say so in our text, but in the thirteenth verse of the fourth chapter he wrote, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." And he could write like that because of what he had himself endured for Christ's sake.

He had been mocked, despised, persecuted. His life had been sought and he knew that he would have to suffer a painful death, for His Master had said to him, "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Putting all these things together, Peter could truly say that he was a witness of Christ's sufferings because he had, in a measure, participated in them.

I hope I am addressing some who can also say—though to a far smaller degree than could the saints of old—"Yes, for Christ's sake we have been accounted fools. We have been reckoned among those who have not the courage to advance with the times. We have been willing to be mocked in the workshop, or in the pulpit, or wherever our lot has been cast among men. And we would cheerfully have borne far more if it had been imposed upon us."

As the persecuted believer looks up to his Lord, he can truthfully say,—

*"If on my face for Thy dear name,
Shame and reproaches be,
All hail reproach, and welcome shame,
If Thou remember me."*

Thus you see how Peter was a witness of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. May each of us be appointed to the same high and honorable position!

II. The second thing which Peter says of himself is, perhaps, more remarkable than the first. He says that he was A PARTAKER OF THE GLORY THAT SHALL BE REVEALED.

I like to see that word "partaker" coming after the word "witness," for I do not think that any man can be a really useful witness for Christ unless he is a partaker. Can you go and talk to others about the bitterness of sin when you have never wept over it or repented of it yourself? Can you speak of the sweets of divine mercy of which you have never tasted?

Will you magnify "precious faith" when you are yourself a stranger to the faith of God's elect? Will you set forth Christ, evidently crucified among men, when you have never seen Him yourself? Can you describe the love which has never cheered your own heart? Will you tell of communion with Christ when you know nothing of its blessedness?

Unhappy man! Your office would be indeed terrible if you were called to such a work. It were better for you to perform the most menial labor, with the most grievous sweat and wear and tear of your very marrow and bones, than have to occupy a pulpit to talk of things which you have never tasted, and handled, and felt yourself. I would sooner not exist than be a preacher of truths which I had never believed in my own soul.

The old writers used to speak of men who served in the shambles and butchers' shops, and who saw and handled and sold the meat, but who themselves died of hunger. And they spoke of wretched folk who prepared dainties for their fellow men, but who did not, as they expressed it, get so much as a lick of their own fingers, but died of famine while they were feasting others.

Oh horrible, horrible, must it be to be sick unto death and yet to be selling medicines that will heal! Oh, dreadful must it be to be hammering away building an ark, as Noah's carpenters did, and yet never to enter it, but to die in the deluge while the ship which you helped to build bears others over the wild waste of waters!

Get ye home, minister. Tear off your gown and lay aside the very name that makes you appear to be a servant of God. Get down on your knees and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner, and forgive me for ever having dared to assume an office whose duties I could not fulfill. For how can I, who am blind, be the guide of others? And how shall I, who am spiritually deaf and dumb, make others hear? And how shall I tell of God and of His covenant, and of His grace, while I know not God experientially, and have no evidence that I am in the covenant, and I have never tasted of His grace?"

That is right, brother—you are getting on the right lines—if you would be a witness, you must first be a partaker. And you who teach in the Sunday school, you who preach at the street corners, you who go from house to house with your tracts, whoever you are who profess to be witnesses for Christ, take care that you are both *witnesses and partakers*. Join the two together—you cannot witness if you do not partake, or if you do witness and do not partake, you only witness to your own condemnation.

Very strangely, Peter here writes of himself as "*a partaker of the glory*." Did he mean that he was on the holy mount of transfiguration and saw the splendor of that sight when Christ was all aglow with a white light which gathered up all brightness and beauty into its solitary ray? Was he thinking of that memorable scene? I know not. It may have flitted across his mind, but in this passage, he says that he is "*a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed*." Not the glory that had been revealed, but that shall be revealed. Is that possible? Can a man be a partaker of a glory that as yet is not revealed?

I answer that he may, first, *by the closeness of his union with the glorified Christ*. If I am, by faith, indissolubly one with Christ, then in His glory I am glorified. On His throne I am enthroned. By His victory I am "more than conqueror." If we are one with Him, then we are raised up together with Him and made to sit together with Him in the heavenly places.

Oh, it is grand when a believer does not so much think of himself as himself, but as part and parcel of his Lord! This is a very high attainment, yet Peter had reached it—and if you are vitally joined to Christ, you may reach it, too. If you have been indeed planted with Him in the likeness of His death, you shall also share the likeness of His resurrection—and you do even now share it with Him, for as He is so are you in this world.

Was He humbled? Every saint underwent humiliation in Christ. Is He glorified? All His elect are virtually glorified in the glorification of their covenant Head. It is indeed a blessed thing to know your union with Christ so completely that you are made "*a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed*" as far as you are personally concerned, but which is already revealed to Christ and therefore is already yours.

I am sure that Peter also means that he had become a partaker of this glory to be revealed *by the absolute certainty which he felt in his own soul that he should be ultimately in very deed a partaker of it*. When a man knows that he has such and such a possession in reversion, if he is very poor, he discounts it and begins to live upon its present worth.

It is a very blessed thing when a child of God knows that because he is in Christ by faith, therefore, whatsoever things God has laid up for His people in general, He has laid up for him in particular.

Whatsoever Christ has prepared for His redeemed, He has prepared for this redeemed one. Often his faith does, as it were, appropriate the future glory, and cry, “It is mine.” The believer begins to glorify God for it, though as yet he has not actually partaken of it, for faith brings him the substance of things hoped for, and is to him the evidence of things not seen.

Brothers, the next best thing to being actually in heaven is to be assured that you will be there, and also to have this thought at the back of the assurance—that you may be there within the next five minutes! Oh, how speedily may you and I be in glory! Before the clock ticks again, I may see the face of the King in His beauty, in the land that is very far off, in some respects, but very near in others.

You know how John Newton puts it,—

*“In vain my fancy strives to paint
The moment after death,
The glories that surround the saint,
When yielding up his breath.*

*“One gentle sigh the fetter breaks:
We scarce can say, ‘They’re gone!’
Before the willing spirit takes
Her mansion near the throne.”*

Well, since this glory is certain and may be so near, let us sit down and look at the golden gates—look until we see them—until they seem to come nearer and nearer and nearer, until the vision becomes so vivid that it ceases to be a vision, and we are actually where we were thinking that we should soon be. It has so happened to many a child of God.

There is one whom God favored with great wealth and to whom a friend said, “What a paradise this lovely garden is!” “Yes,” he replied, “and I bless God for the assurance that, when I leave it, I shall go from one paradise to another and a better one.” Some have said to a poor Christian, “What an ill-furnished place your room is! How scanty are your worldly goods!” “Ah!” the man, has answered, “but I have enough to last me till I get home, for I have the promise that bread shall be given me, and water shall be sure, and then I shall have heaven to crown it all.” When we have faith like that, then are we partakers of the glory that shall be revealed.

There is a step even beyond this when we advance from faith to positive enjoyment. There is such a thing as *anticipating the glory to be revealed* with such a full, realizing faith that we begin to enjoy it even now. Surely, you have, at times, sat down with your fellow believers, when the Word has been preached in the demonstration of the Spirit, and you have said, “Well, heaven must be glorious indeed to be any better than this. My soul is all ablaze with love to Christ and even while my poor body is lingering here,—

*“My heart is with Him on His throne,
And ill can brook delay;
Each moment listening for the voice,
‘Rise up, and come away.’”*

And when the service has been over, you have said, “My soul was like the chariots of Amminadib—whether I was in the body or out the body, I could not tell.” On your bed, sometimes, or in the chamber of sickness, or sitting alone in quiet meditation after you have been enraptured with a vision of your Lord, has it not seemed as if God had taken some dainty dish from off the table of the angels and passed it down to His waiting child below?

Have you not heard stray notes of which you could almost say, “That is the angels’ song, I am persuaded”? And sweet sounds have reached your ears, like the music of “harpers harping with their

harps,” making you impatient of your exile here, but at the same time, making you unspeakably happy until you shall be called up to join in the grand chorus of the church of God above. “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

Yes, beloved, Peter could truly say that he was a partaker of the glory yet to be revealed. I have no doubt that, sometimes, when he preached the Word, his soul was all aglow with holy fervor. I know that, often, I have been so graciously helped by the Holy Spirit to uplift my Lord and Master from this platform, that I have not wanted to go up those stairs any more. I would have liked to just finish up my discourse and say, “Amen,” on earth, and at once begin to sing the everlasting song above.

Have not you, dear friend, also reached that blessed state? I am sure that Peter was often in that condition. And when he was persecuted, and despised, and imprisoned, and his own brethren cast him out, there was often within his own bosom a company of the angels of God, Christ’s sacred host—a very Mahanaim—and better still, there was the Prince of princes, the Angel of the covenant, the Lord and Master of all the angels, speaking deep bliss into His servant’s soul, and filling him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Now, my brother or my sister, if you get that presence of Christ—and I pray that you may—you will be qualified to be a witness for Christ. People will say, “What makes those eyes so bright? What causes that man to be so happy? What is it that produces that calm, quiet spirit in the house? How is it that that man is not troubled as others are? He does not seem to have much cause for joy, but he is very serene and placid in spirit.”

They will perhaps say to you, “What is the secret of it all?” Then you will have an opportunity of saying, “I am a witness of Christ’s sufferings, but I am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Come with me, in thought, to Calvary, that you may learn the meaning of His sufferings, that you may afterwards be taught how you may share His glory.”

I wish I could speak right to the very soul of some of you who do not know my Master—how I wish you did know Him! I cannot imagine what some of you have to comfort you, which you can for even a moment compare with the bliss of knowing my Lord. I have seen your joys, I know something of what mirth can do and what relief laughter may be able to bring, but I also know that these things are of little use in the time of sickness and when one is near death.

It is just at such times that true joy in Christ becomes more deep, more sweet than ever. The less there is of the creature, the more room is there for the Creator. The more of suffering and sorrow we have to endure, the more of content and bliss can we enjoy. And oftentimes, when the body is weak, and the head is aching, and the soul is faint, there is, as it were, a sweet swoon of divine delight which comes over the spirit, which has more strength in it than strength, more joy in it than joy, and almost as much of heaven in it as there is in heaven.

May you know this, for the sake of Him who has loved us and given Himself for us! God bless you all! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 CORINTHIANS 1

I am going to speak about the testimony of the apostle Peter concerning his Lord, but we will first read together part of the writings of his “beloved brother Paul,” that we may see how these eminent servants of Christ agreed in their witness-bearing.

Verses 1-3. *Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to*

be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So this is a message to us also who “call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

4-9. *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Paul was going to blame them for some things that were not right, but he began by commending whatever good was in them by God's grace.

10-12. *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*

So that, at the least, there were four parties in that one little church which ought to have been knit together in unbroken harmony. This is only one instance of what has happened hundreds of times since. These Corinthians had a great many speaking brethren among them and they held services in which it was open to anybody to speak as he felt inclined. There was no reason why they should not do so, but what was the result of it?

This Christian liberty of theirs, by and by, tended to mischief. They became divided into factions, they did not practice discipline as they ought to have done, and therefore this community at Corinth is a beacon to all other churches, warning them not to carry on their worship in a similar style.

It is a very curious thing that some people have taken these Corinthians as an example instead of a warning and having copied their methods, the very same result has followed until there is no section of the church of Christ that has become such a scandal, through its divisions and its intestine quarrels, as that which has imitated the Corinthians in their mode of worship.

I suppose that while human nature is what it is, the same causes will produce the same results to the very end of the chapter. Paul does not tell them that their mode of worship was wrong—perhaps it was not—for great liberty is allowable to Christians, but he does lay the axe at the root of their divisions.

13-14. *Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;*

They were such a quarrelsome set of people that he could not have taken any comfort from having baptized them. He was glad that they could not quote his name as having done so and thus it may be, have added still more to their division and strife.

15-18. *Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*

I suppose that in that church, with its many eloquent speakers and men of knowledge, there came to be a spirit of emulation among them as to which should speak best. And some brethren were tempted to find novel meanings in the Word and to come to the meetings to tell of their wonderful discoveries. The apostle says that he did not so preach—he kept to the cross of Christ, which some counted to be but foolishness. “We know all about that,” said they. “Ah, but!” replied the apostle, “unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

19-21. *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this*

world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

God, in His infinite wisdom, raised up a number of philosophers just about the time of the coming of Christ and a little before that great event. If ever there were great minds upon the earth, it was then—yet these men, with all their schools of thought, knew not God, and the people did not follow after them, so that the earthly wisdom turned out to be a failure.

22-29. *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.*

And at this day, it is a great snare to the church when she glories in her education, when she puts any confidence in the learning, or the wit, or the eloquence of her ministers, when she relies in any degree whatever upon an arm of flesh. The sword of the Spirit, if it be put into a velvet and embroidered scabbard, is all the worse for that. Pull it out. The Word of God cannot cut while it is hampered with human wisdom and human learning half as well as when its keen edge alone is used. It is the Lord, by the power of His Spirit, who must make the Word effectual. Oh, for more faith and truer faith in Him!

30-31. *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

There is no one else in whom we may glory. Far hence be every form of boasting except that of making our boast in the Lord and especially of glorying in the great atoning sacrifice of His dear Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—331, 282

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